

**Office of Oversight
Environment, Safety and Health**

*Phase II
Independent Investigation
of the*

Paducah Gaseous Diffusion Plant

*Environment, Safety, and Health Practices
1952-1990*

February 2000



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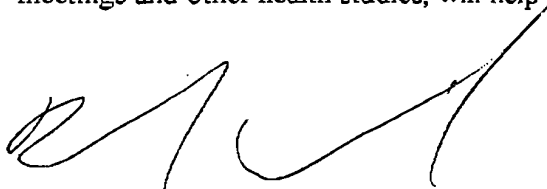
OVERSIGHT

FOREWORD

In the summer of 1999, Secretary of Energy Bill Richardson directed the Office of Environment, Safety and Health to conduct an independent investigation into serious concerns being raised about worker and environmental protection practices at the Paducah Gaseous Diffusion Plant (PGDP). What followed was one of the most thorough and comprehensive independent investigations in the department's history -- involving conduct of hundreds of interviews with current and former workers, review of thousands of historical records and documents, first-hand work place examinations, and environmental sampling and analyses. Together with an October 1999 report that examined recent conditions, this report presents the findings of that investigation. Similar investigations are being conducted at the Gaseous Diffusion Plants in Piketon, Ohio and Oak Ridge, Tennessee.

The investigation brings to light that Paducah -- like the other nuclear production facilities in the complex -- operated in climate of secrecy, with a strong sense of urgency and national need, and without external regulation of worker safety and health or environment. Workers at these facilities were exposed to very hazardous chemicals and in some locations, received significant radiation doses. Some workers may have become ill from those exposures. What sets apart the experience at the gaseous diffusion plants is that workers were unaware of trace quantities of radioactive transuranic elements and fission products contained in the reactor fuel recycled from Hanford, Idaho, and Savannah River, and are concerned about their potential exposures.

Along with the gaseous diffusion plant investigations, my office is conducting public meetings at major DOE sites to hear the experiences of workers in the nuclear weapons complex and learn about the health consequences of those experiences. What we are hearing is that these are hard-working people, with a strong sense of pride in playing a part in the nation's defense, and a great deal of courage in facing very serious hazards. As Secretary Richardson has made clear, it is our policy that where workers have been made ill by this work, we acknowledge our responsibilities, just as we do to our military veterans. This report, along with information from our public meetings and other health studies, will help us find the best way to meet that commitment.



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